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SUBJECT: IMPROVING U.S. DIPLOMACY ON INDOOR AIR POLLUTION

REF: 06 STATE 192919

¶1. Post delivered reftel points to Head of the Department of Air Pollution at the Ministry of Nature Protection Aram Gabrielian. Post's assessment of GOAM commitment to reduce indoor air pollution and summary of recent projects in this area are provided below.

GOAM COMMITMENT

¶2. Assess level of government commitment to reduce Indoor Air Pollution.

¶3. The GOAM's commitment to reducing indoor air pollution (IAP) has been mixed. The legal foundation is relatively strong but not well-enforced and there is a lack of resources to fully combat the problem.

¶4. In 1992, the GOAM passed the law on "Sanitary Epidemiological Safety" which states that Armenian citizens have a right to a safe environment (including indoor air) and established a body within the Ministry of Health to monitor the quality of indoor air. The Ministry of Health began to engage on IAP in 2002, however, when the Ministry became responsible for the maintenance of air and heating units in schools and the circulation of fresh air in school facilities. One possible explanation for the Ministries lack of significant engagement before 2002 is that following independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Armenia's industrial sector collapsed (along with the entire economy and Armenians' material living standards), leading to a dramatic decrease in overall air pollution levels. Residential air quality, however, remained poor, particularly during the winter months when open fires were and still are) used for heat. Smoking, which is commonplace in Armenia, also contributes significantly to IAP.

¶5. In the past few years, the Armenian industrial sector has begun to recover and private vehicle ownership has increased, triggering

greater GOAM involvement on IAP issues. In 2004, the Minister of Urban Development made two decrees tied to the 1992 legislation and related to indoor air pollution. The first decree details the acceptable concentrations of various chemicals indoors. The second regulates indoor air pollution levels in residences and office buildings. While these regulations set stricter standards than those recommended by the WHO, enforcement remains poor and the GOAM has not dedicated significant resources to programs addressing indoor air pollution.

IAP PROJECTS

¶6. Provide examples of any government and non-government projects in the host country related to IAP.

¶7. GOAM projects in Armenia related to IAP focus on household

energy use, particularly natural gas. ArmRusGas CJSCo (which is 45 percent government owned) is required to inspect all residences using natural gas for heating and cooking to ensure proper ventilation of noxious fumes. ArmRusGas has been working to expand the number of residential users of natural gas, but wood-burning stoves remain the primary source of heat in most rural areas. Homemade stoves and improvised modification of residential heating equipment create significant IAP and in 2005, 26 Armenians died from residential carbon monoxide poisoning.

¶18. The USG supports several programs to promote energy efficiency in Armenia and the gasification of schools for heating. Specific activities include:

- The School Heating Project: reconstructing and rehabilitating the heating systems in 40 schools across Armenia.

- The Armenian Energy Sector Partnership: increasing energy efficiency through consumer education and the introduction of new technologies, and promoting energy security through diversification of energy resources, including renewable energy projects.

- The Energy Efficiency and Heat Systems Project: increasing energy efficiency and environmental sustainability in the energy sector.

- The Residential Heating Project: revision of eight gas safety standards in order to make them consistent with European Union standards, drafting of two gas safety technical regulations, and drafting of technical regulations which have been delivered to the Ministry of Energy for review and implementation.

- Democracy Commission: a grant to support regional seminars on gas safety and develop and publish 300 copies of an informational brochure on gas safety, consumer and service provider rights and responsibilities and appropriate regulation.

FUTURE STEPS

¶19. Suggest possible ways to increase IAP mitigation in your host country.

¶10. As the GOAM and private bodies continue to make natural gas available to citizens throughout the country (and particularly those residing in rural areas), the use of traditional biomass (e.g. wood, dung and crop residues) for home cooking and heating will likely decrease. Gasification should be coupled with a concerted effort to promote increase energy efficiency in homes and offices, through improved insulation and other measures. A public outreach campaign on the risks associated with gasification and ways to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning is also needed. Regulation of indoor smoking and the establishment of smoke-free restaurants and offices would also significantly improve the quality of indoor air, particularly in the winter months.

GODFREY